

## Message Text

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ACTION SS-30

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSO-00 NSCE-00 /031 W

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O 241743Z APR 74

FM AMEMBASSY TEGUCIGALPA

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 6890

INFO USCINCSO

S E C R E T TEGUCIGALPA 1698

EXDIS

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PINT, HO

SUBJECT: RUMORS OF UPHEAVAL IN OLANCHO

FOR ARA: CEN DIRECTOR LAZAR

1. ON NIGHT OF QUEEN'S BIRTHDAY, COL SOTO CANO, CHIEF OF HONDURAN AIR FORCE, MADE PECULIAR ARRANGEMENTS FOR IMMEDIATE SURREPTITIOUS VISIT TO HOME OF DCM. HE ARRIVED IN MUFTI AND IN CIVILIAN CAR DRIVEN BY "FRIEND".

2. HE EXPLAINED THAT CATTLEMAN FRIEND OF HIS FROM JUTICALPA, OLANCHO HAD ARRIVED ON MORNING OF APRIL 23, AND STATED THAT HE HAD WITNESSED PEASANTS UNLOADING BOXES OF ARMAMENTS, INCLUDING SUB-MACHINE GUNS. BOXES ALLEGEDLY CAME FROM MOSQUITIA. WEAPONS WERE ALLEGEDLY BEING HIDDEN IN COUNTRY-SIDE, OR ACCORDING TO CATTLEMAN'S JUDGEMENT, IN CATHOLIC CHURCH CENTER OF SANTA CLARA. CATTLEMAN SAID THAT IT WAS BELIEVED THAT PEASANTS WERE GOING TO ATTEMPT TAKEOVER OF SOME FARM ON APRIL 25, LEADING TO ARMED CONFLICT.

3. SOTO CANO SAID THAT HE BELIEVED REPORT, AND WAS WORRIED ABOUT POSSIBILITY OF BLOODBATH. HE HAD JUST THAT MOMENT COME FROM MEETING WITH GENERAL LOPEZ, WHO WAS "TRANQUILO" AND UNCONCERNED WITH STORY. HOWEVER, HONDURAN AIR FORCE WAS ON ALERT, AS WERE "CERTAIN UNITS" WHICH AIR FORCE

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PLANES WOULD CARRY IF NEEDED. DCM COULD NOT ELICIT

WHICH UNITS WERE ON ALERT.

4. SOTO CANO EXPLAINED THAT HE WAS INFORMING EMBASSY BECAUSE OF OUR "NATURAL INTEREST". HE HAD REFRAINED FROM CONTACTING AMBASSADOR, BECAUSE IT WOULD HAVE ATTRACTED TOO MUCH ATTENTION. DCM ASSURED HIM OF OUR INTEREST, BUT POINTED OUT IT WAS MATTER IN WHICH EMBASSY COULD NOT INTERFERE.

5. SOTO CANO SURMISED THAT WEAPONS MIGHT HAVE BEEN LANDED FROM THE CUBAN SHIPS WHICH WERE DISCOVERED STOPPED OFFSHORE OF RIVER PATUCA ON MARCH 20. ( THIS WAS IN RESPONSE TO DCM QUESTION.)

6. DURING CHAT, SOTO CANO INTERPOSED SAME INTEMPERATE REMARKS ABOUT GOVERNMENT AS HE DID ON MARCH 22, TO DCM. HE ATTACKED MINISTERS, AND PARTICULARLY FONSECA. HE ASSERTED THAT MANY OFFICERS WERE UPSET ABOUT DANGERS FROM PEASANTRY, AND REPEATEDLY REFERRED TO COL. MIGUEL ANGEL GARCIA, COMMANDER OF SECOND ZONE, AS PARTICULAR COMPLAINANT. HE TREATED ENTIRE MATTER AS MOST URGENT, IN KEEPING WITH HIS REPORTED APRIL 25 DATE.

7. COMMENT: ON ITS MERITS, SOTO CANO'S ACCOUNT SUFFERS FROM SOME UNRESOLVED INCONSISTENCIES, INCLUDING WHY HE ATTRIBUTES SUCH ALARMING IMPORTANCE TO STORY FROM SINGLE CATTLEMAN. SIGNIFICANCE OF EPISODE HOWEVER, DERIVES FROM SIMPLE FACT THAT HE CAME TO DCM RESIDENCE UNDER SUCH PECULIAR CIRCUMSTANCES.

8. HIS SUDDEN AND COMPLETELY OUT OF CHARACTER AND CHANNELS CONFIDENCE IS DIFFICULT TO EVALUATE, BUT WE SUPPOSE THAT HE WAS OBLIQUELY NOTIFYING US EITHER OF POSSIBILITY OF COUP, OR OF HIS OWN EMERGING OPEN OPPOSITION TO LOPEZ. IF A COUP IS CONTEMPLATED, IT CONCEIVABLY COULD BE BASED UPON TROOP DISPOSITIONS CALLED OUT IN RESPONSE TO ARMED VIOLENCE IN OLANCHO.

9. THERE HAVE BEEN LOOSE RUMORS OF COUP FOR PAST MONTH, BUT WE HAVE DISCOUNTED THEM, AS HAVE MOST OF OUR HONDURAN  
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CONTACTS. AS USUAL SOTO CANO AND COLONEL MELGAR ARE LINKED AS PROGENITORS OF MOVE, BUT RECENT GOSSIP, FROM SEVERAL SOURCES, HAS ALSO INCLUDED COL. MIGUEL ANGEL GARCIA. INFORMED HONDURANS HAVE TENDED TO EXCLUDE MELGAR FROM CABAL AS HAVING RECENTLY DEVELOPED INTO "ALCOHOLIC". EMBASSY CANNOT CONFIRM THIS, ALTHOUGH EPISODES HAVE BEEN CITED TO US THAT HE HAS BEEN SPENDING WORKDAYS AT HOME IN ALCOHOLIC STUPOR. EMBASSY STILL

FINDS IT DIFFICULT TO BELIEVE THAT COUP IS PLANNED.  
INSTEAD, SOTO CANO MAY MERELY BE TRYING TO DRAMATIZE  
PRE-PLANNED OUTBREAK OF VIOLENCE IN OLANCHO, AS ARGUMENT  
AGAINST CABINET, PRESENT (VAGUE) AGRARIAN REFORM PLANS,  
AND CURRENT PEASANT ACTIVITIES.  
SANCHEZ

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## Message Attributes

**Automatic Decaptioning:** Z  
**Capture Date:** 01 JAN 1994  
**Channel Indicators:** n/a  
**Current Classification:** UNCLASSIFIED  
**Concepts:** GOVERNMENT OVERTHROW, ARMS SMUGGLING, EXTREMISTS  
**Control Number:** n/a  
**Copy:** SINGLE  
**Draft Date:** 24 APR 1974  
**Decaption Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Decaption Note:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Action:** RELEASED  
**Disposition Approved on Date:**  
**Disposition Authority:** GolinoFR  
**Disposition Case Number:** n/a  
**Disposition Comment:** 25 YEAR REVIEW  
**Disposition Date:** 28 MAY 2004  
**Disposition Event:**  
**Disposition History:** n/a  
**Disposition Reason:**  
**Disposition Remarks:**  
**Document Number:** 1974TEGUCI01698  
**Document Source:** CORE  
**Document Unique ID:** 00  
**Drafter:** n/a  
**Enclosure:** n/a  
**Executive Order:** GS  
**Errors:** N/A  
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**Office:** ACTION SS  
**Original Classification:** SECRET  
**Original Handling Restrictions:** EXDIS  
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**Page Count:** 3  
**Previous Channel Indicators:** n/a  
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**Previous Handling Restrictions:** EXDIS  
**Reference:** n/a  
**Review Action:** RELEASED, APPROVED  
**Review Authority:** GolinoFR  
**Review Comment:** n/a  
**Review Content Flags:**  
**Review Date:** 17 SEP 2002  
**Review Event:**  
**Review Exemptions:** n/a  
**Review History:** RELEASED <17 SEP 2002 by boyleja>; APPROVED <05 FEB 2003 by GolinoFR>  
**Review Markings:**

Declassified/Released  
US Department of State  
EO Systematic Review  
30 JUN 2005

**Review Media Identifier:**  
**Review Referrals:** n/a  
**Review Release Date:** n/a  
**Review Release Event:** n/a  
**Review Transfer Date:**  
**Review Withdrawn Fields:** n/a  
**Secure:** OPEN  
**Status:** NATIVE  
**Subject:** RUMORS OF UPHEAVAL IN OLANCHO FOR ARA: CEN DIRECTOR LAZAR  
**TAGS:** PINT, HO, (CANO, SOTO)  
**To:** STATE  
**Type:** TE  
**Markings:** Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 30 JUN 2005